## TDOT Announces Decision on Walnut Grove Relocation Plan

Nashville, Tennessee - The Tennessee Department of Transportation (TDOT) announced today that it would refer a proposal to relocate Walnut Grove Road in Shelby County back to local government officials for future planning. TDOT Commissioner Gerald Nicely made the announcement during a news conference at T. O. Fuller State Park in Memphis.

"This is a local project, it's locally funded, and should be defined and carried out by local officials if they choose to go forward," Commissioner Nicely said. "Should the city and county decide to continue with the Walnut Grove project, they will be required to complete an acceptable environmental document."

The project involved the relocation of Walnut Grove Road between Humphreys Boulevard and Germantown Road in Memphis. It also included the extension and reconstruction of two other roadways in the area.

Nicely's announcement comes after a detailed University of Tennessee Center for Transportation Research review of 15 proposed TDOT projects across the state. Nicely requested the study last spring after taking over as the head of TDOT, and immediately stopped any work or planning being done on the controversial projects that represented more than a billion dollars in road construction work. Governor Phil Bredesen and Commissioner Nicely targeted the 15 projects based largely on comments the Governor had received during the 2002 campaign.

The independent UT study involved a series of "Listening Sessions" conducted around the state. It focused on collecting information from citizens, communities, city planners and government officials about how the projects were deemed necessary in the first place. The second study goal was to provide input for TDOT to identify areas for the improvement of its highway planning, business and communications practices.

In the case of the Walnut Grove Relocation Plan, the UT review team found that TDOT should take no further action on the project until several things took place.

"Certain issues must be resolved at the local level, such as selecting a preferred alternative," said Dr. Stephen Richards, Ph.D., Director of the UT Center for Transportation Research. "The necessary environmental, economic and social impact studies must be done by local officials, and more consideration should be given in order to reflect the unique characteristics of Shelby Farms as well as the surrounding natural areas."

TDOT will immediately notify the Memphis Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) and the Mayor of Shelby County that this project is being referred to local government.

"If and when local government decides to move forward, we will assign members of TDOT's planning staff to assist the MPO in achieving a better design based on a balance of concerns about preserving environmental and community interests," Nicely said. "All engineering work done under the state's direction will be made available to local planners."

A complete synopsis of this decision is attached.

## Project: Walnut Grove Relocation Memphis and Shelby County

Project Description: This project involves the relocation of Walnut Grove Road between Humphreys Boulevard and Germantown Road in Memphis and the extension and reconstruction of two other roadways in the area. Between Humphreys Boulevard and Germantown Road, Walnut Grove Road currently runs east-west through Shelby Farms. This is a 4,500-acre former county penal farm now providing a variety of governmental and recreational uses. The proposed project would begin just east of the Wolf River Bridge on the West Side of Shelby Farms where it would tie into the planned reconstruction of the intersection of Walnut Grove Road and Humphreys Boulevard into a single-point urban interchange. Its purpose is Walnut Grove Road would be relocated from its present straight alignment to follow the western and northern edges of Shelby Farms. The project would end at a new interchange with Germantown Road north of the present interchange. The project would result in the elimination of existing Walnut Grove Road through Shelby Farms as well as Farm Road. The new Walnut Grove Road would be access-controlled. The project also involves the extension and reconstruction of two other roads in the area. Sycamore View Road would be extended a distance of 1.6 miles to a single-point urban interchange with the relocated Walnut Grove Road on the West Side of Shelby Farms. The other ancillary project involves the reconstruction of .84 miles of Raleigh-LaGrange Road.

This project was initiated locally in 1969. Since that time several proposals have been made resulting from local discussion and public meetings resulting in the latest proposal. This is considered a high local priority.

**UT Findings:** TDOT should take no further action regarding the project until certain actions are accomplished and issues resolved at the local level. If a build-alternative is selected locally, it must be clarified that Alternative B is truly a "design modification" of the previously approved Alternative A.

The City of Memphis and Shelby County, in consultation with interest groups and the general public, should re-affirm support and interest in pursuing the project to completion. Assuming there is continued local government support, the appropriate local entities should work to select a preferred alternative and perform the necessary environmental, economic, and social impact studies. This project is a good candidate to apply Context Sensitive Design principles in planning/designing the project in order to reflect the unique characteristics of Shelby Farms as well as the surrounding residential and natural areas.

Assuming that a build-alternative is selected and pursued, it should be clarified Alternative B is truly a "design modification" of the previously approved Alternative A.

**TDOT Review:** The multidisciplinary team agrees the project should not be revised until local issues are resolved and local officials want to proceed. A formal plan defining a land use development concept for Shelby Farms is essential.

When/if that occurs, the department should begin with a new Advanced Planning Report. At the request & direction of local officials, the ending terminus was determined to be the existing Walnut Grove/Germantown Parkway Interchange, which is too restrictive. The only other alternative addressed in the present APR was an avoidance alternative to avoid a proposed taking of historical properties. This alternative did not tie into the existing interchange and was eliminated because it did not meet the "Purpose and Need" of the project. The "Purpose and Need" should be expanded to provide transportation network in the Shelby Farms area. This would allow a much wider range of alternatives to consider.

An important issue to be resolved locally is the disposition of the railroad along the north side of Mullins Station Road. Apparently, this rail facility is out of use or will soon to out of use. If abandoned, the right-of-way could be used to improve Mullins Station Road, which, if extended to Germantown Parkway, would be an alternative. If local officials plan to use this rail line for light rail commuter transportation, a commuter station could be constructed near Germantown Parkway.

A combination of alternatives, i.e., improving and extending Mullins Station Road, light rail, park and ride lot located at the Agricenter, utilization of Humphreys Blvd, could eliminate the eastwest Walnut Grove Road from the farm.

The TDOT team believes adverse impacts must be addressed. These include: air/noise and visual impact to residential area north of Mullins Station Road; increased congestion on Germantown Parkway east of Shelby Farms; right-of-way acquisition to extend Mullins Station Road to Germantown Road and cost and construction issues involving east-west continuity east and west of Germantown Parkway.

**Decision:** Refer to local government. This is a local government project and the responsibility of the City of Memphis, Shelby County, and the Memphis Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO). Should the city and county decide to continue with the Walnut Grove project, they will be required to complete an acceptable environmental document based upon project alternatives and proposed actions. TDOT will then receive this document and forward it on to the Federal Highway Administration on behalf of the city and county.

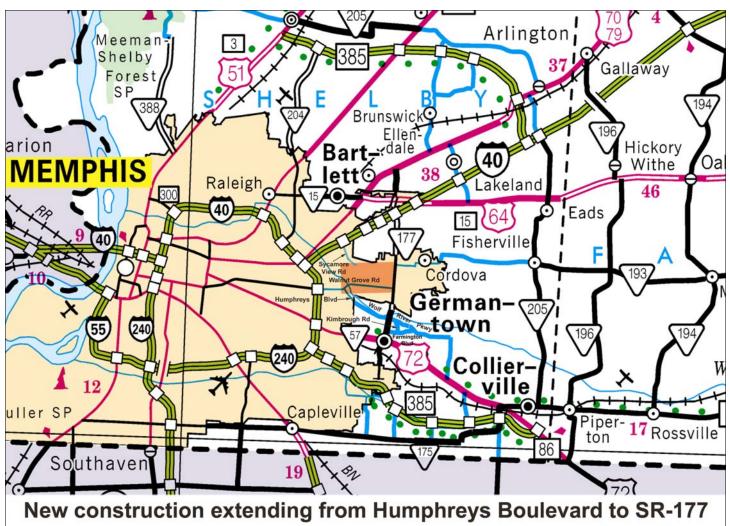
**Next Steps:** TDOT will notify the Memphis Metropolitan Planning Organization and the Mayor of Shelby County that this project is being referred to local government. <u>This notification will occur immediately.</u>

TDOT will assign Division of Planning staff to work with the MPO in order to assist with Context Sensitive Design analysis of alternative alignments and designs for the Walnut Grove project as recently proposed by the Mayors of Shelby County and the City of Memphis. <u>Arrangements for this support will be made within the next 30 days</u>.

TDOT will participate, as requested, in the Memphis MPO process for developing a recommended alignment and design and the completion of appropriate environmental documents for this project when the MPO is ready to proceed.

## Map of Proposed **Walnut Grove Relocation Plan** In Shelby County

**Project Area** 



Germantown Road including the extension of Sycamore View Road.